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AUTHOR Edwards-Wilson, Runae
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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a proposal for a pilot project that will train undergraduate students to interact effectively with faculty. The training is targeted for both social and academic situations. The students involved in the project are opportunity program students who may or may not be on academic probation. The project is an extension of a mentoring program that was previously implemented by the SEEK program at the College of Staten Island, New York. The target sample will be 10 students with grade point averages below 3.0. It will include some students on academic probation. A second group of students will be monitored, but not mentored, as a comparison group. Mentors will be alumni of the SSK program. It is hoped that by teaching at-risk undergraduate students appropriate social protocols they will be more successful in achieving their goals in social situations that will benefit them academically. (Contains 15 references.) (Author/SLD)

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Runae Edwards-Wilson

Faculty Interaction Training: An Extension of The SEEK Mentoring Program
Pilot Project

Abstract

This article discusses a proposal for a pilot project that will train undergraduate students to interact effectively with faculty. The training is targeted for both social and academic situations. The students involved in the project are opportunity program students who may or may not be on academic probation. The project is an extension of a mentoring program that was previously implemented by the SEEK program. It is hoped that by teaching at-risk undergraduate students appropriate social protocols that they will be more successful in achieving their goals in social situations that will benefit them academically.

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Faculty Interaction Training: An Extension of The SEEK Mentoring Program Pilot Project

Literature Review

The use of mentors to retain and support at risk students has been documented by researchers like: Donovan, 1976; Fleming, 1984; Levin & Levin, 1991; Tinto, 1993; and Fletcher, 1997. Mentoring has been described as an integral part of "...an intensive care unit where students are not given choices, but are provided with an atmosphere best described as tough love (Donovan, 1976)." The work of these researchers maintain that successful mentoring programs help to establish a structured, yet nurturing relationship in many environments, including college support programs. The SEEK Program at the College of Staten Island has conducted a mentoring program that has been successful at positively impacting upon the retention of at-risk students during the 1999-2000 academic year.

As an extension of this program we would like to implement a faculty interaction-training component that would teach students how to interact effectively with faculty in both academic and non-academic settings. The new programmatic component is based on the concepts presented by researchers studying student services, retention, and faculty interaction (Chickering, 1974; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977; Churukian, 1982; and Lampert, 1993). These researchers found that there was a partial correlation between student faculty interaction and freshman-year persistence. They also reported that the students who interrelated with faculty members rated academic and nonacademic college life positively. The more a student interacted with faculty the more probable was they're remaining at the institution. Noel and Levitz in the materials that they circulate in their Power Strategies for Recruitment & Retention seminars discuss the positive effects on retention of additional attention from faculty in the forms of mentoring, evaluation, and early contact.

In our implementation of the student/faculty interaction component the SEEK Program hopes to largely utilizing cognitive behavioral theoretical models drawn from the works of theorist whose practices have proven to be successful in producing sought after behavioral changes; specifically, the social learning theories of Bandura's, (1977) and Curran & Monti (1982). Bandura's concepts regarding observational learning state that behavioral changes can be adapted based on the observation of the desired behaviors in a significant other. The work of Curran & Monti, (1982) regarding social skills training has a professional model desired behaviors, the client imitates and rehearses these behaviors in role-playing exercises, and the professional responds with a combination of praise and constructive criticism.

The faculty/student interaction program will use these models by having mentors role-play faculty student meetings concerning academic issues, non-academic issues and social situations. It is hoped that as a result of these role-plays mentees will learn how to interact effectively with faculty members.

Introduction

Many colleges (University of North Carolina, Minnesota State University, St. Thomas College, Elon College, Miami University) and several studies about student retention and persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977; Churukian, 1982; Tinto, 1997) have found that there is a relationship between faculty student interactions, both in academic and non-academic situations, and increased freshman student persistence. Apparently, the students persist because they begin to believe that not only do they have a competent academician in the classroom but that they also have an ally who will help them attain their academic goals outside of the classroom.

It is presumed that students who are having academic difficulty may also lack social-skills. Their shortcomings in social skills can affect their ability to interact effectively with the faculty members who teach them. This feeling of social awkwardness in the presence of an instructor might be based on psychological factors or academic competencies (Eric Goffman, 1967). Nevertheless, it is necessary for students to overcome the inhabiting behavior to secure their academic success¹.

The following proposal discusses a plan to increase the retention and persistence of opportunity program students by increasing the interactions between students and faculty members outside of the

¹ Interpersonal intelligence is considered important in Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (See Howard Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice*. 1993) .

classroom. A secondary goal of this proposal is to enhance the verbal and behavioral social skills of the test sample.

Participants

Students

The target sample for this study will be ten students with GPA's below 3.00, attending both Psychology 100 and Biology 100. Students on academic probation or warning will be included in the sample. Participation for students who are not on probation or warning would be voluntary. These students will also be paid a stipend or fellowship of 100 dollars each to off-set the transportation cost for attending the program and purchasing required day planners, student guides, and other materials. They will be given the funds in increments of 50 dollar at three-week intervals; and each participate in a mentoring intervention.

A second group of ten students will be monitored as a control group. The second group of students will be attending the same classes as the first but will not receive the mentoring intervention. Both groups of students must have attended the college for at least one semester and be considered freshmen.

Mentors

The mentors used for this project will be selected from SEEK alumni who have completed forms circulated as a result of the SEEK alumni project, which was a grant funded initiative to gain information about alumni and encourage them to volunteer for projects in the SEEK program.

Each student receiving the mentoring intervention will be assigned a mentor who would meet with him or her once a month to address faculty-student interaction issues. Additionally, the students would be required to meet with their mentor at least three times during the semester regarding academic and interpersonal issues. Mentors would attend all faculty and student meetings and role-play the faculty member in the videotaped role-plays preformed for interaction training purposes. Mentors would also teach students appropriate protocols for social and academic situations.

Before faculty/student meetings and social events the students and mentors will role-play possible interactive situations. When issues arise about proper classroom decorum, specific suggestions along with role-playing will be the major supportive intervention used. The students and the program coordinator will evaluate the role-plays and make constructive suggestion for improving faculty-related exchanges. Two mentors will be hired each having caseloads of five students. They will work for ten weeks during the fall semester.

Faculty

The faculty participating in the study would be the faculty teaching Psychology 100, and Biology 102. These two courses were chosen because they meet two of the College's general education requirements and the SEEK Program offers supplemental instruction, a tutorial, in them. Thus, a relationship has already been developed between the faculty members teaching the courses and the SEEK Program. The faculty members would be required to meet with the students at least twice a semester, in their office, to discuss the student's grades. The meetings would be scheduled before mid-term evaluations are issued and after the Thanksgiving holiday. These times were chosen because they would allow the SEEK program to arrange remediation in subjects where it was deemed necessary.

The faculty would also be asked to attend at least two luncheons, and to help review and evaluate videotapes of the students rehearsing role-plays between themselves and a faculty member played by a mentor. Additionally, they would meet with the program's coordinator once during the semester to discuss the participants' academic performance in their classes. The faculty members would be paid a stipend of \$250.00 for the time they commit to the project. A faculty orientation meeting would be scheduled early in the fall to introduce the faculty to the project and its goals and to solicit their suggestions.

Program Coordinator

The Program Coordinator will oversee the program, observed mentees in the classroom and evaluate them on participation, attentiveness, and seating. The observations will be shared with the mentees. The coordinator will also prepare all correspondence and reports.

Procedures

Caseloads

Two mentors will be hired. Mentors will be assigned caseloads of 5 mentees. Mentees and mentors must meet once a month.

Training

The program coordinator will chair monthly staff meetings held in the SEEK office and attended by the mentors and faculty members. During the meetings programmatic issues and training needs would be addressed. Two training sessions would be scheduled in August for the mentors to learn cognitive behavioral psychology methodology, social protocols, and role-play theory.

Each mentee participating in the program would be interviewed to evaluate their knowledge of appropriate classroom behavior (sitting in the front of the classroom, taking notes, reading a textbook), and their ability to persist in the program. They would also complete an adjusted version of the Interactive Index both at the beginning and the end of the program. All of the mentees would view a film about study skills, attend a campus tour and participate in three SEEK workshops concerning valuable learning habits.

Activities Implemented

At the beginning of the project mentees in the test situation would be administered an adjusted version of the Interactive Index to assess their social comfort level with faculty. They would also complete the index at the end of the project to detect any change. Throughout the project all of the mentees' test, quiz, and paper grades will be collected and reviewed by the program coordinator.

Mentees will be coached by their mentors regarding appropriate behavior, discussions with faculty members during faculty student office meetings, and the protocol during professional luncheons. Suitable topics for social discussions and desirable behavior will be practiced and the role-plays will subsequently be video-taped. The videotapes will be evaluated and reviewed with the students by the mentors and/or the program coordinator. The review will take place before the students meet with the faculty members privately and before the luncheons.

Data Collection

The study would be qualitative. The number and quality of faculty/student interactions both during office visits and at social events would be evaluated and noted on assessment sheets that the instructor and the program coordinator will complete based on interactions and/or observations. At least three evaluations will be completed for each mentee. The mentees will be administered an adjusted version of the Interactive Index to assess their attitude towards interactions with powerful figures such as faculty members. The assessment will be administered before and at the end of the program. Additionally, all the participants' final grades will be collected and evaluated to measure significant difference between the two groups. The statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) will be used to analyze all data.

Further Study

It is hoped that the same cadre of students who take part in this project will take part in student/faculty research projects in the future. As part of the research project faculty members would mentor them.

Budget

Faculty Stipends-2 faculty members @ \$250.00 each	\$ 500.00
Student Stipends-10 students @ \$100.00 each	\$1000.00
Mentor Salaries-4 mentor @ \$8.00 pre hour, for 4 hours pre-week, for 10 weeks	\$1280.00
Clerical Support-1 Student Assistant @ \$5.00 pre hour, for 10 hours pre-week, for 10 weeks	\$ 500.00
1 Video Camera	\$ 900.00
Interactive Index test-20 @ \$15.00 pre instrument plus the manual @ \$20.00	\$ 340.00
Two luncheons @ 12 per person, for 15 people	\$ 360.00
Supplies-1 box of pens, 1 case of paper, 1000 copies, 15 video tapes, 1 box of note pads, four copies of I'm OK You're Ok.	\$ 120.00
Total	<hr/> \$5000.00

Faculty Stipends \$500.00-Faculty would be paid an honorarium of 250.00 each for the time they committed to the evaluation of student/faculty exchanges and for attending social events.

Student Stipends \$1000.00-Each mentee will receive a stipend of \$100.00 to offset transportation costs for attending the program and purchasing required day planners, student guides, and other materials.

Mentors \$1280.00-Four mentors will be hired to work with five protégés each.

Video Camera \$900.00-A video camera would be used for the training of mentees by mentors. Role-plays between the mentees and mentors would be video-taped and evaluated by the program coordinator and/or mentors. The will be replayed for the mentors/mentees with constructive criticism noted.

Luncheons \$360.00-To be spent on two luncheons held for students and faculty at the campus dinning hall.

Clerical Support \$500.00-A Student Assistant will be hired to type memos, letters, and reports for the project.

Personality tests \$340.00-To purchase 20 copies of the interactive index will be purchased to be administered to mentees at the beginning and the end of the program.

Supplies (paper, pens, note pads, copying, videotapes) \$120.00-These funds will be used to specifically cover the needs of this project.

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Signature: 	Printed Name/Position/Title: Runae Edwards-Wilson, Ph.D. Assistant Professor/SEEK Counselor	
Organization/Address: College of Staten Island 2800 Victory Blvd. Staten Island, New York 10314	Telephone: (718) 982-2414	Fax:
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